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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRISTINA 000783

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DEPT FOR DRL, INL, AND EUR/SCE, NSC FOR BRAUN, USUN FOR
DREW SCHUFLETOWSKI, USOSCE FOR STEVE STEGER

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SUBJECT: KOSOVO ELECTIONS PROCEED CALMLY: PDK WINS BIG,
LDK LOSES GROUND, AND SERBS STAY AWAY IN DROVES

REF: USOP SITREPS OF 11/17/07

Classified By: COM TINA KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Kosovars went to the polls on November 17 to elect their central and local assemblies, as well as mayors in Kosovo's 30 municipalities. USOP observer teams, plus the Council of Europe mission and local NGOs, all reported technically sound balloting. KFOR, UNMIK and the Kosovo Police Service (KPS) reported no serious incidents. Snowy weather may have contributed to the 43-45 percent turnout, not a markedly lower figure than the 50 percent turnout in 2004 elections. Hashim Thaci's PDK was the biggest winner; LDK, the current ruling party, was the biggest loser; and LDK's rival offshoot party, the LDD, was the day's biggest surprise, along with a significant showing by AKR, the party of Swiss emigre businessman Bexhet Pacolli. Kosovo's Serbs observed the boycott, with clear signs of intimidation from their own leaders. A coalition among the PDK, LDK and ICTY indictee Ramush Haradinaj's AAK would provide the most stable outcome, given the demands of the post-Troika talks period. The LDK, after an initial period of shock, is coming around to this idea, but the likelihood of a PDK-AAK rapprochement is harder to envision. An LDK-PDK coalition without AAK would have a majority, but not as convincing, and could mean continued sparring between government and opposition during the status determination period. END SUMMARY.

PDK Emerges Victorious

2. (SBU) Unofficial, parallel vote results of Kosovo's November 17 elections, from a coalition of USG-funded NGOs, show a resounding victory for former KLA leader Hashim Thaci's Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK). Turnout was a bit lower than in previous years (some 43-45 percent), possibly due to inclement weather. Based on our teams' reporting, the process went smoothly and the isolated technical problems that our 14 USOP teams saw throughout Kosovo had no impact on the results.

3. (SBU) The unofficial parallel vote tally (PVT) shows the PDK with 34 percent. The ruling Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) -- which had won every previous election in Kosovo -- is at 22 percent. Swiss emigre multimillionaire businessman

Bexhet Pacolli's New Kosovo Alliance (AKR) party finished third with 12 percent (a comfortable showing though one not necessarily consonant with the amount of money poured by Pacolli into the campaign), followed by Nexhat Daci's Democratic League of Dardania (LDD) with 10 percent, and Ramush Haradinaj's Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) with 9 percent. Results still show Vetton Surroi's Reformist Party (ORA) party at 4 percent, thus below the five percent threshold. (Note: The PVT is based on around 2,400 observers at polling stations around Kosovo text messaging results from the vote count to a dedicated, central server. While we expect the PVT results to generally hold true for the larger parties, because the PVT only counted the six leading vote-getters, the ORA figure could grow since it was likely the seventh or eighth party in some districts.)

¶4. (U) Our observers reported that voters did not have trouble with the three-ballot, open-list system, with many saying that frequent voter education TV ads helped explain the process. (One ad that was cited showed a mildly exasperated 8 year-old girl explaining to her befuddled father just how simple the process was.) Particularly in rural areas, our observers reported voters were coming prepared with their lists pre-selected. There were no security incidents and our teams reported that local election officials were well-trained and generally followed the rules.

Serb Boycott Holds Universally

¶5. (U) According to the Central Election Commission (CEC), some 750 Serbs voted in the election. The Serb enclave of Gracanica had the "highest" turnout (200), while the northern Serb-majority municipality of Leposavic reported a single

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voter. Under half of the 104 polling stations in Serb areas opened, and most of those were staffed by internationals. School administrators refused to open their premises, and in one case, children blocked USOP access to their school. OSCE had mobile voting stations, and other stations were consolidated and relocated into municipal buildings. Our observers reported the presence of other "observers" in Serb areas, men in plain clothes who were clearly there to discourage Serb participation.

¶6. (U) There will be runoff elections on December 8 for mayors in 25 of 27 municipalities. (Note: This does not include the three Serb-majority municipalities of Zvecan, Zubin Potok, and Leposavic.) The PDK won outright in its western strongholds of Skenderaj/Prekaz and Drenac; in Skenderaj/Prekaz, PDK candidate Sami Lushtaku won 80 percent of the vote. Early returns show that the PDK is doing well in local elections, with the LDD also faring well in eastern Kosovo.

Comment

¶7. (C) Informal coalition discussions began immediately and will continue in the days ahead. Thaci has indicated to us privately that he will offer LDK a coalition arrangement; though the LDK defeat has left the party demoralized and some of its members inclined to move the party into opposition, we sense that the tide is turning and the LDK will in the end acknowledge the benefit of being in government at the time when status is finally determined. The addition of AAK to the coalition would be beneficial as well, providing a more convincing majority, but Hashim Thaci's traditional antipathy to Ramush Haradinaj will make this difficult to achieve, raising the possibility of continued government-opposition sparring through the status determination period.

¶8. (C) COMMENT (cont'd): No Kosovo Serb will be able to claim an elected mandate at either the central or local level. UNMIK is still deciding how to deal with this challenge, the likeliest outcome being an UNMIK-sanctioned continued mandate for sitting Serb municipal authorities in

northern Kosovo and some attempt to appoint ethnic Albanians in proportion to their percentage of the electorate in the mixed areas of Novo Brdo and Strpce. The latter will be a difficult proposition to enforce, with Serb local authorities -- backed by Belgrade -- promising not to respect any outcome that displaces sitting authorities. Nevertheless, the overall outcome of these elections is a positive one: both the campaign and the elections themselves were conducted democratically, with results respected by all despite some surprises and disappointments for the parties involved. End comment.

KAIDANOW